

Silver Mt. Zion: An Unprecedented Musical and Emotional Anomaly

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Music is an art form that holds immeasurable beauty and power, and the abilities it possesses seem to be unlimited. Cultures and communities thrive off the storytelling that distinctive styles of music provide. Certain musical ambiances cause listeners to enter a state of absolute focus or rest. Unique soundscapes instill in listeners the overwhelming urge to dance and sing. Even so, to me, the capability to provide solace for those who struggle with mental health issues is music's most important prowess. There has been a vast array of tunes and melodies that have helped me through my mental battles. *Meteora* (2003), *Disintegration* (1989), *Rage Against the Machine* (1992), and *You Don't Mess Around with Jim* (1972) are a few examples from my younger years. Nonetheless, as I grew older, I gradually ventured into new, unknown styles of music. When I reached my lowest mental state, around mid-2020, I discovered projects like *Below the House* (2017), *Deathconsciousness* (2008), and *Giles Corey* (2015). Regardless, *He Has Left Us Alone but Shafts of Light Sometimes Grace the Corner of Our Rooms...* (2000) by the post-rock band *A Silver Mt. Zion* (SMZ), also known as *Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra*, was the most impactful from that year. The band was founded by Efrim Menuck, Thierry Amar, and Sophie Trudeau, all members of *Godspeed You! Black Emperor*, in 1999, in Montreal, Quebec. SMZ's 2000 release has a long name; going forward, I will refer to it as "He Has Left Us Alone," a shortened version of its title.

He Has Left Us Alone offers eight tracks that blend elements of jagged chamber orchestra and classical compositions into the traditional post-rock style. Each track's sound captures the essence of the grim and the alluring through its own methods. Violin, bass, guitar, organ, piano, vocals, and various other instruments are morphed and altered to create audio environments that capture the essence of both the macabre and the divine. The emotional charge it had was intricate and immensely profound. While every track contributed to the project's perfect execution, there are some that resonate with me more. First, 13 Angels Standing Guard 'Round The Side Of Your Bed comes to mind. The violin is played slowly and calmly. It creates a delicate, soft, and melancholic tone. Delayed droning loops and heavily altered vocals design an angelic, otherworldly noise. When listening to this track, I felt as if I was being held in a cold yet comforting embrace. It helped me gain some repose in times during which I felt uncontrollably anxious. Second, I think of Sit In The Middle Of Three Galloping Dogs. Violin and drums are played with great strength and intensity, establishing a tense atmosphere. The guitar and piano scores incorporate atmospheric, haunting techniques, developing depth and complementing the more prominent instruments. An industrial-style hum plays throughout, forming a unique background ambience. With this track filling my ears, I felt a strange energy spike that broke through the fatigue that crippled me. I could find the motivation to clean my living space. Third, I am reminded of Movie (Never Made). Vocals are sung with panic and pain, and the lyrical themes explore the joy and sadness in society and revolution, inventing a new, peculiar sense of content. The piano is played in a sluggish and ghostly manner; the violin follows suit, but only for a small duration. The bass is played in a sporadic yet careful way, creating a deeply troubled tone. Immersed in this track, I felt as though both virtue and vice, good and evil, resided in society. I can only control myself, and I should live and see what I can do in this vast world.

Fourth, my thoughts turn to For Wanda. Piano and violin are performed with measured sophistication and hopelessness. Distorted samples of fireworks, laughter, and cheering sound in the background. Through this track, I had the ability to cope with the fact that not all good things last forever. Each track played a part in getting me through each day.

Whether I felt multiple emotions at once or a particular emotion was overwhelming, SMZ's He Has Left Us Alone helped me preserve my sanity. My description of this album's sound and effect on listeners does not do its brilliance justice. Regardless of your post-rock understanding or tastes in music, very few albums can offer you this experience. I implore you to listen to this album in its entirety, as that is the only way you can truly understand it.